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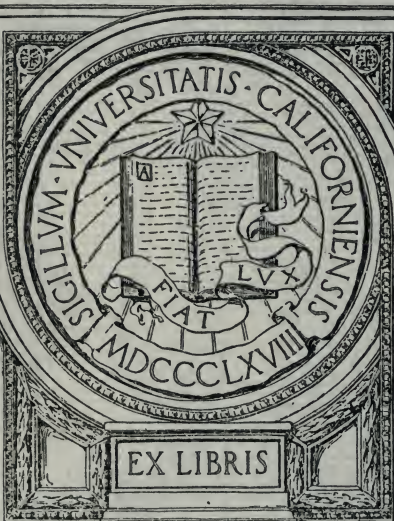
PHYSICAL EDUCATION

IN INDIA

ABDUS SALAM

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PHYSICAL EDUCATION
IN
INDIA.

PHYSICAL EDUCATION IN INDIA

BY

ABDUS SALAM, M. A.,

of the Provincial Civil Service,

AUTHOR OF TRANSLATIONS OF URFÍ AND ZAHURÍ,
&c., &c.

Jism zâhër Rûh mâkhhfî âm i dâst

Jism hâmhû âstîn Jân hâmhû dâst.—MAULANA RÚM.

Calcutta
W. NEWMAN & CO.
1895.

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PHYSICAL EDUCATION IN INDIA

BY
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IN THE UNIVERSITY OF DELHI

NEW DELHI
1941

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DEDICATED, BY KIND PERMISSION,
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SIR CHARLES ALFRED ELLIOTT, K.C.S.I., C.I.E.,
Lieutenant-Governor of Bengal,
IN GRATEFUL RECOGNITION OF HIS HONOR'S
BENEFICENT SOLICITUDE
TO MELIORATE THE PHYSICAL CONDITION OF
THE YOUTHS IN BENGAL,
BY DIFFUSING AMONGST THEM MORE WIDELY THE
BLESSINGS OF PHYSICAL EDUCATION,
AND BY AFFORDING THEM GREATER FACILITIES
FOR TAKING TO MANLY
WESTERN GAMES AND OUT DOOR SPORTS.

CALCUTTA, }
1895. }

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PREFACE.

THE following pages contain the substance of a Lecture recently delivered at the celebration of the first Anniversary of the Calcutta Mahomedan Sporting Club, held in the Madrasah-hall under the presidency of the Hon'ble Justice AMEER ALI, M.A., C.I.E.

The subject of physical education of Indian Youths deserves greater attention than it has hitherto received ; and, therefore, at the request of several friends interested in the welfare of Indian young men, I am led to put forward this *brochure*, as my humble contribution towards the subject, with special reference to Mahomedans. If it, in any measure, conduces to a better appreciation of the importance of manly out-door games

and physical exercises generally, by my young friends, both Hindoo and Mahomedan, I shall feel amply rewarded.

ABDUS SALAM.

CALCUTTA, }
January, 1895. }

PHYSICAL EDUCATION IN INDIA.

MAN is endowed by nature with certain faculties and powers, and it is the aim of education to bring them out, to develop them, and to improve them. These faculties and powers, broadly speaking, are two-fold in character, namely Physical and Mental. To develop them, therefore, education should also be two-fold, that is, physical and mental; physical education aiming at the maintenance of our physical health by developing our physical powers, and mental education aiming at the preservation of our mental health by developing our mental powers.

Though the subjects, Body and Mind, of which these two systems of education treat, are distinct, yet they are inseparable, that is, so far as we can conceive human existence in

this world ; and they are also, according to physiologists, intimately connected. This intimate connection is beautifully expressed in the following Persian lines of the great mystic poet of the East, Maulana Rúm :—

Tăn ză ján O ján ză tăn Mastúr níst
Laik kăs rá díd-i-ján dástúr níst.

Physical education, though of less absolute value than mental education, is superior by reason of the liberality of its gifts. The blessing of health which it promises to its votaries, is open to all alike—to the king and the peasant, the rich and the poor, and the high and the low. Also, when regarded from the stand-point of its relative value, physical education has pre-eminent importance compared with which the importance of all other subjects, even mental education, sinks into insignificance. The reason is simple. The object of physical education is preservation of health and life, and health and life constitute

the bases on which we can raise other superstructures, such as those of intellect, wisdom, piety, wealth, power, rank and fame, &c. To translate a Persian saying, one blessing of health is equal to a hundred blessings. It is the principal element in human happiness, and, therefore, it has been well observed, that "a healthy beggar is happier than an ailing king."

Another consideration also shows the immense value of physical education. We all value medical science, because it cures diseases and restores health. Now, it is an undeniable fact that moderate and judicious physical exercise, to a great extent, prevents diseases, and preserves health. And, therefore, it is evident that physical education has an equal claim on our attention ; for prevention of disease is better than its cure, preservation of health better, easier, and cheaper than its restoration.

The necessity of physical exercise, in some shape or other, is evident from the fact that every faculty or capacity, mental or physical, with which God has endowed us, requires proper exercise for its full and harmonious development. Life means movement, activity. We must exercise our mental faculties, that our intellect may not rust ; we must cultivate our moral feelings, that they may not suffer in grace and sweetness ; and similarly, we must exercise our arms and muscles, in order that they may not lose their vigour and agility. Physical education aims at the maintenance of health, by directing itself to the exercise of all the parts of which this wonderful mechanism of the human body is constituted. Whilst on this point, I am tempted to quote the words of the German philosopher, Schopenhauer :—" Without a proper amount of daily exercise, no one can remain healthy ; all the processes of life demand exercise for

the due performance of their functions, exercise not only of the parts more immediately concerned, but also of the whole body. For, as Aristotle says, 'life is movement, it is its very essence.' Ceaseless and rapid motion goes on in every part of the organism. The heart, with its complicated double systole and diastole, beats strongly and untiringly; with twenty-eight beats, it has to drive the whole of the blood through arteries, veins and capillaries, the lungs pump like a steam-engine without intermission, the intestines are always in peristaltic action, the glands are all constantly absorbing and secreting, even the brain has a double motion of its own, with every beat of the pulse and every breath we draw. When people can get no exercise at all, as is the case with countless numbers who are condemned to a sedentary life, there is a glaring and fatal disproportion between outward inactivity and inner tumult. For this ceaseless

internal motion requires some external counterpart, and the want of it produces effects like those of emotion, which we are obliged to suppress. Even trees must be shaken by the wind, if they are to thrive."

In addition to the above, the observations of a most eminent Indian medical authority, Sir J. Fayrer, may be profitably quoted. The following appears in his lecture on preservation of health in India:—"The morning is the time for exercise and fresh air, and it is well to devote an hour or so to walking or riding. Exercise is essential to health, and it is a duty to obtain it. The use of the Indian clubs is a good supplement to other exercise; it develops the chest, and gives vigour to the muscular system. Exercise prevents languor and inactivity, and tends to keep off liver congestion and dyspepsia." From the above two extracts, one can perceive the great necessity of taking some amount of daily physical exer-

cise for the preservation of life and health. Of course, the amount and nature of the exercise must vary according to the strength and weakness of different constitutions, and the golden rule of avoiding excess should be observed in this, as in all other matters of life.

The necessity of taking physical exercise has been always recognized in Europe. In the ancient times, we find its most civilized people, the Greeks, priding themselves on their contests of strength and skill, which formed the great features of their four pan-Hellenic festivals, called the Olymic, the Pythean, the Nemean and the Isthmian games. These physical contests, generally in the shape of gymnastic exercises, such as chariot-racing, boxing and wrestling, which took place for a month, expressed the Greek sentiment that humanity adored Zeus best by the harmonious development of both mind and body. Public buildings called gymnasia were erected, and

gymnastics made a part of Medicine. Nor were the Romans behindhand in their pursuit of physical education. The Romans, like the Greeks, took great interest in their gymnasia, at which the Roman youths practised in wrestling, running, boxing, dancing, leaping, riding, swimming, rowing, &c. The gladiatorial contests, which were at once the glory and the shame of the Roman amphitheatres, may also be mentioned amongst the forms of physical exercise current amongst the ancient Romans. The Romans possessed strong arms and sturdy souls, and triumphed over what they called the 'barbarian' races of the world, so long as they delighted in healthy martial and physical exercises, and maintained the rugged simplicity of their character. The exchange of physical and martial exercises for luxury and intemperance, brought about their fall. In this, they, in a manner, anticipated the

tragic issue of the fates of so many Moslem dynasties and empires, in more subsequent days.

In modern times in Europe, the Swedish system of gymnastics is popularly adopted, besides out-door sports, such as cricket, foot-ball, tennis, badminton, riding, walking, rowing, swimming, boxing, shooting, hunting, dancing, skating, archery and golf, &c. In the Universities of England and the Continent, the students to this day pride themselves as much on their athletic dexterity, as on their mental acquisitions. They do so rightly, because in a well-planned, scientific manly game, such as cricket or foot-ball or tennis, it is not only our physical powers that are brought into play, but also higher moral qualities, such as independence, presence of mind, self-reliance, discipline and self-control are developed. And, therefore, Rousseau's observation seems pithy, namely, "that if you

wish to develop the mind of a pupil, develop the power which that mind has to govern, exercise his body, make him healthy and strong, that you may make him prudent and reasonable." Besides the out-door sports mentioned above, people in Europe receive military training—which serves the purpose of physical education—in their Military Schools, as well as under the militia laws, and the volunteering system. Sporting leagues also exist in parts of Europe, to influence public opinion in favor of manly games, and to promote generally the cause of physical education. All these, along with the bracing climate of Europe, combine to keep up the health and physical vigour and manliness of the western races.

In the East also, in ancient times, physical education and physical manliness occupied the attention of statesmen and citizens, and were the themes of poets, from the days of Goliath.

For instance, in Arabia, in the early days of the Islamic period, we find the Arabs priding themselves on their dexterity in the use of the sword, in horsemanship and archery. The tournaments with their laws of chivalry, which softened the ruggedness of European society in the middle ages, and which are described in rapturous language in the pages of western writers, owed their origin to the Moslem Arabs or Saracens, better known as the Moors, who supplanted the Gothic empire in Spain in the eighth century. In these tournaments, Knights, followed by squires, entered the lists with blunted swords and lances, which they broke in mimic fighting with their peers. Indeed, Moslem youths in the past, not only in Arabia but also in Persia, Syria, Turkey, Afghanistan, Central Asia and India, used to take pride in hand-to-hand combats, in the use of the bow and the gun, in riding and wrestling, in the use of "*mudghurs*" or dumb-

bells and *lathis* or clubs, and in practices with the sword, the lance, and the scimitar. The game of Chaugan, which was the favourite pastime of Akbar on sultry evenings under the shade of his fortress at Agra or Fathepur-Sikri, is the modern polo carried to Europe from India.

The early Moslem immigrants in India from the North-West—from Balkh and Badakhshan, from Ghazni and Samarkand, from Bokhara and Bagdad—were not pale Epicures in petticoats, but they were stalwart, ruddy and stern Puritans of the Cromwell type in tight tunic and trousers, and their chief delights in life, next to fighting in the ways of Allah, consisted not in lounging and idle gossiping and *hookah*-smoking and betel-chewing, but in taking physical exercises in all forms, in hunting and shooting, in riding and walking and swimming. Babar and his comrades were keen sportsmen, and they

swam every river that blocked their progress during their thirty years' campaigning. Akbar was one of the best equestrians that the world has ever seen, and his Omrahs not only vied with him in riding long distances, but in organising hunting excursions, whenever they found respite, however short, from the more arduous duties of consolidating the Empire. Though their uniform success and unchallenged paramountcy through three successive reigns had tended to quench their old martial fire, and to breed soft luxury by the jovial times of Jahangir and Shah Jahan, and though, in consequence, the 'heroic soldiers of the early Empire and their no less heroic wives had given place to a vicious and delicate breed of grandees,' yet this growing effeminacy of the Mussulman race was effectually curbed for a period by Aurangzeb, who himself was a noble instance of a hardy and energetic man of action, combining in himself

the austere simplicity of an Indian ascetic, and, who, with the foresight of a statesman, interdicted all the old voluptuous frivolities and effeminate exhibitions which had crept into Court, and encouraged instead, on all State occasions, elephant-fights corresponding to bull-fights in Spain, and other manly athletic exhibitions. Thus, despite the ominously increasing looseness of their petticoats and skirts, the Mussulmans in India in Moghul times for a considerable period, managed to keep up their manliness and physical energy, and never ceased to be keen sportsmen.

The consummate skill and heroism—the physical prowess and dexterity in wielding the sword which deservedly earned him the title of the ‘Sword of God,’ the prodigies of valour and feats of discipline displayed by Khaledbin Walid in hand-to-hand combats with Hormuz, the Persian Prince, and with Jarija, and on the battle fields of Walaja,

when the Persians under their veteran warrior Bahman were routed, and of Wacusa, when 40,000 Arabs vanquished 2,40,000 Romans—all this is treasured up to this day in every Mussulman heart as its past glorious physical and martial heritage, and may be taken as typical of the physical vigour, manliness and discipline which, in a greater or less measure, characterised the Moslem race in the seventh century. The bare mention of the names of Omar, Ali and Hamza, of Hassan and Husain, of Mothana, Caca and Sad—the heroes of Cadesiya, of Amr, the conqueror of Egypt, of Tarik, Musa and Abdur Rahman, conquerors of Spain, of Harun-ul Rashid, the Caliph of Bagdad, whose whirling scimitar was ever ready to rescue friends and punish foes, of Mahmud of Ghazni, Mahomed Ghour, Nadir Shah and Ahmad Shah Durani, of Babar, Akbar, Aurangzeb and Hyder, of Timur, Othman

and Mahomed II, conqueror of Constantinople and supplanter of the Empire of the Cæsars, of Solyman the Magnificent, the conqueror of Hungary and Greece, who thundered at the gates of Vienna and was the terror of Italy and Germany, is sufficient to kindle patriotic emotions, and to bring home to our minds the physical prowess and intrepidity, the manliness and vitality, the discipline and presence of mind which distinguished the Mussulman race from the seventh to about the end of the eighteenth century.

The annual mimic fighting connected with the celebration of the Mohurram tragedy, answered, to some extent, the purpose of physical training to Mahomedans in India, Persia and Afghanistan, just as the Ram Lila festival answered a similar purpose in respect of the Hindoos. And the very form of the Mussulman liturgy embodies physical exercise. Thus the most eloquent tribute to the cause of

physical education is paid by Islam !

In contrast with this brilliant past as regards physical vigour and manliness, the lack of physical energy which now more or less characterises the Mahomedans in India stands out in bold but dismal relief. Our one-sided Western education, so far—contrary to the fond dream of Lord Macaulay—has acted with us like a bad liver : it is making us assimilate what has to be rejected of the Western import, and reject what has to be assimilated. We are rapidly parting with our own national ways and manners, the sweetness and grace which distinguished our noble sires, without imbibing those of the West. In the case of a few here and there, there might be visible some surface Western polish, but it is no more than skin-deep ; the result being that whilst the sweet guilelessness and gentle suavity of the East is absent, the genuine sturdi-

ness and masculine straightforwardness of the West is also wanting. This is not the occasion to animadvert on this new and rapidly developing phase of our national character, but in regard to its physical aspect, one is bound to observe that our exclusively Western ideas have not, so far as practice is concerned, made us much wiser. Many of us have ceased to pray five times a day, and have thus wantonly deprived ourselves of the physical exercise which the Mussulman liturgy embodies. Our modern prosaic tendencies have abated our enthusiasm in reference to the annual evolutions connected with the celebration of the Mohurram tragedy, called by Mathew Arnold the 'Great Passion play of the East,' and have thus attenuated another socio-religious incentive to our physical training. We despise, more or less, the indigenous physical exercises of the East, such as wrestling, practices with "*mudghurs*," clubs, "*dun*," archery, &c., taun-

ting those who practise them as *pahlawans* or wrestlers, and at the same time we have failed to take, like other elastic and less conservative races in India, to the manly Western games, such as tennis, foot-ball, cricket, &c. The fact is significant and speaks volumes, that whilst the Hindoos possess not less than half-a-dozen sporting clubs in Calcutta, the Mussulmans here have only one or two, and those also not well-supported. Walking is considered now-a-days amongst us more or less Plebeian, though, be it noted, the great and illustrious Caliph Omar, twelve hundred years ago, in his notable journey from Medina to Jerusalem, to receive the capitulation of the Romans, chose to do a great portion of the journey by walking, giving his place on the camel's back to a slave, and that too, when he commanded the unlimited resources of the Great Caliphate, and was second to no monarch of his day!

Speaking of the Mussulmans in India, and especially in Bengal, their physical deterioration may be briefly, and, at the same time more or less aptly, described by saying, that they would prefer lying down to sitting, sitting to standing, standing to walking, and walking to running. It may be a painful digression, but I cannot help remarking that this physical attitude more or less represents our present mental attitude ! What havoc Time has wrought in our national character ! To the student of history, possibly, such things will be ! Possibly, to some extent, this physical deterioration may be accounted for by the laws of nature. With the progress of civilization, with the march of refinement, with the pursuit of arts of peace, there would probably be a corresponding abandonment of martial habits and manly exercises, and a consequent deterioration in the physical vigour and vitality of a race. The sturdy children

of the Arabian desert, living on coarse barley-bread and dates, and clad in coarser stuff, possessing all the vigour of a youthful race, knowing no other luxury than riding on their spirited Arab steeds and wielding their sharp swords, would yield to the process of enervation, when coming in touch with the soft vales of Andalusia and Syria and with the splendour and riches, luxuries and dissipations of the land of the Chosros or the Byzantines, and would gradually exchange the coarse saddle of the horse-back for the soft *divans* of the Alhambra. Similarly, the rugged children of the plateau of Central Asia and of the defiles of Afghanistan, fed on coarse bread or camel's flesh, and innocent of all luxuries, except sitting on the camel's back or sleeping under the shade of tents, and brandishing their mighty scimitars, would succumb to the siren environments of the Happy Valley of Cashmere, and exchange their rugged tent-life for the

cosy cushions of palaces or garden-houses at Delhi, Agra, Lucknow and Moorshedabad. 'The hardy troopers of Balkh had grown soft in the Capua of the Jamna.' Such things cannot be altogether helped in the course of a nation's destiny! The water of life, like the water of the Ganges or the Brahmaputra, will gradually tend to become diffuse and spend its force and fury, as it will recede from its fountain-head, but all the same that the flow of the current may continue, that its force may not be altogether lost even in the soft deltaic soil of Bengal, human ingenuity, aided by engineering skill, has devised a system of embankments and dams. Similarly, in these piping-days of peace and high intellectual pressure and especially in this enervating Indian climate, when more than ever a race is apt to get emasculated, it is absolutely necessary that we should have recourse to physical exercise in such shapes as are available, in order

to prevent our physical energy and vitality being totally sapped. It is not suggested that we should turn a race of athletes, wrestlers or gladiators, but what is urged is that, in order to keep up our health, vitality and manliness, and to enjoy life, we should take moderate daily physical exercise in the shape of riding, walking, practice with *mudghurs*, wrestling, shooting, rowing, swimming, gymnastic exercises, or other manly sports, such as cricket, foot-ball, tennis, &c. It was by exercises like these that our fathers, within living memories, used to keep up their health and strength. But the present sledge-hammer system of education seems to have destroyed the last vestiges of our physical vitality. Young men, both Hindoo and Mahomedan, forego now-a-days physical exercise, and sacrifice their health, and, sometimes, life for standing high in University examinations. In consequence of this misplaced intellectual mania, an impression pre-

vails that mortality amongst the educated Indian youths is abnormally high. How far this impression is well founded, I am not in a position to vouch, but that such an impression should exist is sufficiently significant and portentous. One result, however, of this intellectual mania, is decidedly tangible in the appearance of our University men, who are generally weak in *physique* and health. This is a defect in the present system of education in this country, which deserves more serious attention at the hands of all friends of Indian progress than it has hitherto received. The present system is of an one-sided character : it aims at the intellectual advancement of the Indian youths, but it pays little heed to the healthy maintenance of those physical powers, on which this intellectual advancement must necessarily hinge. It would be not a day too soon, if our educational bodies stepped forward, and assigned physical educa-

tion its proper place in their systems, and better still would it be, if the well-wishers of society, both Hindoo and Mahomedan, spontaneously organised sporting leagues or syndicates of physical culture to influence public opinion everywhere in favor of manly sports and games, and to promote generally the cause of physical education in this country.

It must, however, be added, and gratefully acknowledged, that something in this direction has been already done by that far-seeing and noble-hearted statesman, Sir George Campbell, who introduced gymnasiums in Government Schools and Colleges some twenty years ago, and also latterly, by His Excellency the late Viceroy Lord Lansdowne, who offered a Cricket Challenge Shield for competition by native elevens from any School or College in Bengal, and by Lord Harris in Bombay, and by His Honor Sir Charles Elliott in

Bengal, all of whom have given proofs of their great interest in the physical education of Indian youths, by encouraging out-door physical sports. And I understand in Calcutta, under the auspices of our present noble-hearted Lieutenant-Governor, it is contemplated to open a large Sporting Ground in Marcus Square, where students of all Colleges and Schools will be able to meet together for healthy physical recreation. It is hoped that our young men will fully avail themselves of its advantages. Such a sporting ground would not only afford a great impetus to the cause of physical education, but, it is trusted, would in some measure solve the present anxious problem of the growing estrangement between races by promoting better and more friendly relations between the Christian, Hindoo and Mahomedan youths. A Common Sporting Ground, more than any other platform, that is, so far as India is concerned, seems to be a

very good nursery, where seeds of union and solidarity between races can be sown, and may, in ripeness of time, be expected to germinate, and grow into shady plants.

I will conclude this with a word to my young Mahomedan friends. The charge is often brought that you have lost the vigour of your intellect; do not furnish your traducers the pretext to add also that you have lost your physical vigour and manliness! Let the memories of the physical prowess and manly achievements of your ancient leaders and noble sires, enshrined in the pages of history and depicted in the martial lines of Firdousi, inspire you and thrill you with ambition to maintain your physical vitality and energy, at any rate not to be worsted on sporting grounds!





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